TL108

Interview with Xanana

A War of Survival

East Timor, is just starting its seventeenth year of war.

An independence war which is aid to have cost the lives of more than one in three of the East Timorese population.

Indonesia claims that through 'an act of self determination', 'East Timor integrated itself in 1976' thus becoming Indonesia's 27th province.

After 16 long and isolated years, more than 1,000 East Timorese are still fighting a guerilla war against the Indonesian army.

Mr. Xanana Gusmao, leader of the Falantil Armed Forces of East Timor and member of the Timorese National Resistance Council is a symbol of hope for the East Timorese.

In an exclusive interview, Mr. Xanana responded to written questions on a tape recorder provided to him by an Australian journalist.

With intense military and intelligence presence in East Timor, the risks were too high for the Australian journalist to meet him in person.

The journalist's name is not being revealed for the safety of the East Timorese people with whom contact was made.

Q: How strong is Falantil Resistance at present ?
A: Sufficient for Djakarta to continue being preoccupied with the war and keep on burying its dead.

Q: Is the East Timorese Resistance showing its opposition to Indonesian rule other than through armed conflict ?
A: There is an intrinsic relationship between the popular Clandestine Resistance and the armed resistance - one feeds the other. They are apparently two separate aspects for those who are outside this reality, but they are deeply linked. I would say that there exists an umbilical cord that renovates the life of the (East Timorese) global resistance itself.

Q: Does the East Timorese Resistance have expectations resulting from the (Portuguese) Parliamentary mission.

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A: As you already know, the visit has been suspended and we are waiting for confirmation that it will definitely be cancelled. I am learning not to worry about eternal hypotheses.

Q: What is your view of the Portuguese Parliamentary mission to East Timor ?
A: I wouldn't know how to answer now, not to hide my own expectations or frustrations but also not to allow the news to be more confusing because there are rumours in Portugal that I will surrender (and leave with) the Portuguese Parliamentary Delegation.

Q: There have been elections in East Timor, with some controversy. Have the East Timorese been allowed to organise politically and as a consequence how has Indonesian 'Parliamentary Democracy' effected the East Timorese ?
A: I think that above all, what is necessary for us is to sit on a table to discuss this and/or other questions on the negotiation table under the auspices of the United Nations. I think we will achieve something.

Q: You have asked for Unconditional Talks with Indonesia over East Timor. How do you propose the conflict be solved in East Timor ?
A: As I said for the previous question. On the negotiation table we'll play a fair game and I think that there will be good will from all parties to find a solution for the conflict.

Q: If Indonesia were to withdraw from East Timor, what process do you envisage taking place in the transition to independence ?
A: To set up future perspectives while there has been an unexpected suspension of the visit by the Portuguese Parliamentary Delegation and we await that it will be cancelled .... it has taken away the sense of reality from me. What I must do now is face the perspectives of the struggle.

Q: Indonesia claims include slash and burn agriculture being responsible for the barren landscape in much of East Timor. What do you consider to be the causes of deforestation and other environmental damage in East Timor ?
A: It is a big lie. The majority of the territory is a military action zone. The occupying troops have constantly burnt the grass for 16 years. In reality it is hard to prove this because you cannot go up to the mountains. They burn the grass at least 3 times a year, killing what has grown and all that is growing during the wet season, including big trees.

If you had asked me this question some months ago, I would have asked all our groups to take some photos of these burnt zones done by the Indonesian forces in their action against the Guerillas. We are now on the eve of the wet season and the grass although green can provoke an optical illusion of this problem.

Q: How have East Timorese languages and cultures been affected since 1975 (the invasion) ?
A: On the basis that 'Bahasa Indonesia' was imposed on us together with the invasion of 'Lagu Lagu' (Indonesian music), local languages have suffered a great disfiguration, particularly with the introduction of Indonesian words that we are forced to use in our daily lives precisely because we have to contact the occupationists. This does not happen with the people in the mountains. In the mountains, we maintain and revive all the aspects that are profound to our mentality, our way of life and culture.

I think that although you don't understand, you can feel something that signifies precisely the soul of our people - the Maubere soul.

All the people live spiritually, and in this way they can try and cope with the extermination of their culture. Today in the concentration camps this (traditional culture) is forbidden.

Some traditional dances are no longer owned by our own people. Now they are owned by the occuppationists who make them perform only on commemoration days of ABRI (Indonesian Armed Forces), for example, on the integration day, the republic of Indonesia day etc... Therefore the people do not live their own culture today. Today they live the war and sometimes, they are obliged to exhibit as if they were acting, the Maubere culture in the sense of misleading the world.

Q: Australia has recognised East Timor's incorporation into Indonesia, one of few nations to do so globally. How do you view Australia's role regarding the Timor Gap ?
A: Australia unfortunately represents the political mafia, the distortion of democratic principles, the exponent rampage. What Sadam Hussein wanted to commit on Kuwait, Australia is trying to achieve in more democratic ways.

Q: Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Evans claims that East Timor is now a province of Indonesia but at the same

time his Government is very concerned about human Rights Abuses in East Timor. What is your response ?
A: My answer is the same as the previous answer.